DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 502 FL 017 455

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TITLE Suzuki Spanish: The Parent-Child Connection.
PUB DATE [88]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Children; Family Environment; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Second Language Instruction; *Spanish; *Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Milwaukee Public Schools WI; *Suzuki Method

ABSTRACT

A parent-child foreign language learning program based on the Suzuki Method is proposed. The method is based in large part of the application of Suzuki's "Mother Tongue Method" and the "Suzuki Triangle: Student, Parent, Teacher," which suggests that the child, aged 8-10 years, and a parent attend classes together. The instructional process then continues in the home environment in daily living situations with the parent as teacher and supporter. The program capitalizes on the strengths of the parent-child relationship to enhance academic achievement and further family relationships. It is noted that with this method, the teacher must address a variety of aspects of parenting, some of which may convert concern into pressure, and having the parents work with other people's children during the lesson is suggested as one way of alleviating ego problems. The Mother Tongue Method has five elements: listening, applying each item to daily living situations, daily practice and repetition, slow but thorough progress, and using everyday parent and teacher attitudes and skill in building enthusiasm. Specific classroom and home techniques for teaching parent-child Spanish are outlined, based on the approach's five elements, with examples given from Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public Schools materials. (MSE)

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SUZUKI SPANISH: THE PARENT-CHILD CONNECTION

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I looked to Dr. Shinicki Suzuki, musician and world-famous educator of children to find the key to teaching a foreign language to children in the middle years, only to find that, ironically, Suzuki had discovered how to teach music to children by observing the ways they learn language. He writes, "What kind of violin training would be good for a 4 year old? I thought about it from morning to night. One day... it hit me like a flash: all Japanese children speak Japanese! Since they all speak Japanese so easily and fluently, there must be a secret; and this must be training. Indeed, all children everywhere in the world are brought up by a perfect educational method: their mother tongue. Why not apply this method to other faculties?" (qtd. in Herman 2).

The following is a proposal for a Parent-Child foreign language learning program. It is based in large part on the application of Suzuki's "Mother Tongue Method" and the "Suzuki Triangle: Student, Parent, Teacher." It suggests that the child, age 8-10, and a parent attend classes together. The instructional process then continues in the home environment in daily living situations with the parent as teacher and supporter. This program capitalizes on the strength of the parent-child relationship to enhance academic achievement and to further family relationships.

What Age Child is Best?

Much has been written by neurolinguists and psycholinguists regarding the optimal age for second language learning. In spite of experiments in the affective domain, neurologically speaking, it is still generally held that students can acquire a second language best, as Lenneberg suggests, before puberty. It is suggested in this proposal, that the Parent-Child program deal with children in the middle years defined variably as 8-10 or 6-12 years old.

Neurolinguistic considerations aside, let us consider the psychological and sociological make-up of a child in the middle years to determine why this age is best in terms of learning along with a parent. Briggs in her chapter "Journey of Self: Middle Years" writes that "the middle aged youngster actually operates in two worlds: that of adults and that of peers" (Briggs 140). It seems advantageous, then, to combine both the peer group and the parent group at this time. She goes on to say that, "between eight and ten, the major task of selfhood is the need for an adult model of the same sex. Formerly you were a god. Now you are not a distant deity, but a flesh and blood hero that they want close association with" (Briggs 145). This attitude on the part of the child promotes the success of the parent-as-teacher aspect of both the Suzuki method and the language program detailed below.

Slone also describes the 8-10 year old as a good candidate for the Parent-Child language learning program. She says that the child "is accustomed to dealing with learning situations, with words, ideas and concepts, and appreciates being approached in an adult manner, with respect for his burgeoning intellectual capacities" (Slone 22).

Why Involve the Parent and the Home?

In the Suzuki methodology, emphasis is on education in the home and developing the child in cooperation with the parents. Slone, in her chapter on the "Suzuki Triangle" states: "In traditional teaching or in the average school situation, the parent is a shadowy figure who does not really become involved in the actual teaching situation. In the Suzuki approach, the success of the approach depends upon the triangular relationship of parent, teacher, and student, rooted in a strong environment. Each arm of the triangle is of equal length, indicating equal importance. There is no love

more strong, more fierce, than parental love. It is this love and concern which is a parent's strength. Love, hope, expectation, pride, concern, bring a parent to a level of involvement that is helpful to the child's growth" (Slone 29).

Other educators have concerned themselves with the parent-child connection. They suggest that

> through workshops, parents may learn the interaction patterns that are necessary to develop their own self-concepts, self-esteem, and classroom confidence. Such interactive relationships can promote the "teaching home" which is enhanced as parents gain confidence in helping their children with homework and other assignments. Cooperative planning sessions call for parents and students to work together to solve problems, locate information, or just simply discuss school-related issues. With such parental support, students are motivated to perform academically to the best of their ability. (London 488)

Nicassio in his article "Parent-Child Communication During a Home Instruction Task" refers to the "focal parent" who can be a grandmother or significant other. In his research he studied the inter-communication and oral problem solving skills of parent-child dyads in shared experiences. He discovered that the child and the focal parent make an ideal problem solving team. He states that "this interpretation corresponds with Bruner's (1975) premise that language is a conventionalized extension of cooperative action and is acquired as an instrument for regulating joint activity and attention" (qtd. in Nicassio 341).

What Does the Parent Do?

Suzuki observed that in teaching a child to play the violin, first the parent must be trained. He explains:

> First we teach the mother to play one piece so that she will be a good teacher at home. As for the child, we first have him simply listen at home to a record of the piece he will be learning. Children are really educated in the home, so in order that the child will have good posture and practice properly at home, it is necessary for the parent to have first hand experience. The correct education of the child depends on this. Until the parent can play one piece, the child does not play at all. (Suzuki 95)

Slone further describes the role of the parent in the Suzuki Triangle. The parent attends all violin lessons, practices with the child at home and supervises listening. Private, one-to-one home teaching is very important in the Suzuki philosophy. There is both physical and emotional involvement on the part of the parent. She emphasizes, however, that the child should have only one teacher at a time. (Slone 49) At no time will the parent interfere with the teacher during the classroom lesson. And neither should anyone interfere with the parent at home. Slone also recommends some separate parent lessons. The parent must know what is correct and incorrect, where the student is headed and how the teacher intends to get him there. The parental role in terms of a language program is similar to that of the music program and will be described below.

A Word of Caution

One of the primary tasks and privileges facing the teacher is that of working with the parents of his students. To the job of parenting, people

bring love, ego-involvement, hope and expectation, guilt. The teacher must address all these aspects of parenting. However, Slone warns that "these same traits can turn a concerned parent into a pushy, overbearing parent whose desires are in conflict with and detrimental to the child's growth and happiness" (Slone 29).

Briggs also advises that "The commonest cause of learning blocks, particularly in children from middle class families, comes from undue pressure to achieve goals beyond their reach. Make shared experiences opportunities for criticism and pressure, and they'll come to be dreaded. Make them opportunities for warm and respectful closeness and they'll come to be treasured. Nurturing love turns on mental growth" (Briggs 20).

In order to prevent possible problems in both the music and the language programs the teacher can intervene in several ways. As the teacher observes the working relationship of the parent and child, he should make suggestions. Such suggestions should always be positive and include support for the good job the parent is doing. Often it is helpful to have parents work with someone else's child during the context of a group lesson. It is far easier because the ego is not so involved.

The Mother Tongue Method

Suzuki describes five aspects of the Mother Tongue Method. He asserts that a child can learn music, arithmetic or other lines of learning by the same method as we teach him his mother tongue. "I firmly believe that cultural and musical aptitude does not come from within, and is not inherited, but occurs through suitable environmental conditions" (qtd. in Suzuki 13).

1. <u>Listen</u>

A child learns to speak by first listening. "The record player is the teacher in the Suzuki home. The selection is played over and over again

until the tune is learned well beforehand, and then the child is taught to play it" (Herman 140). Suzuki suggests, "If you are learning to play an instrument... listen continuously to the best performers in the world on records" (qtd. in Suzuki 44).

2. Apply Each Item to Daily Living Situations

"The first point to learn from the child's education in his native language is the fact, from very simple beginnings, each item is applied in daily living situations until he fully absorbs it. In my educational method this is a primary point to which I strictly adhere" (qtd. in Herman 140).

3. Daily Practice and Repetition

"Do not rest in your efforts; this is another fundamental rule. To commit yourself to untiring patience and strong endurance, what we call kan--intuition or sixth sense--is an absolute necessity in education" (qtd. in Suzuki 46). Referring to music, Suzuki says, "Training and educating children is much like training a parakeet to speak: it requires much repetition and patience" (qtd. in Suzuki 6).

4. Slow but Thorough

Do not hurry. This is a fundamental rule. Dr. Suzuki suggests that the start be kept very slow and extremely easy material presented. There should be no mistakes and no failures. He suggests that the child learn one thing, then practice and polish it every day. (qtd. in Suzuki 13)

5. Everyday Parent and Teacher Attitudes and Skill in Building Enthusiasm

Suzuki stresses the importance of lengthy practice sessions of three hours a day. They are to be conducted as playtime activities. He also stresses the idea of test games. "We are able to do all sorts of tasks while we are speaking in Japanese because it is second nature. It is exactly the

same with the violin" (qtd. in Suzuki 99). Suzuki asks the students questions while they are playing. "If they can answer while playing correctly it means that the skill has been properly inculcated and has become second nature. If... there is a child for whom it is not yet second nature, he will be so intent on his playing that he does not reply. Or if he replies, he will stop playing" (qtd. in Suzuki 99).

It is suggested here that these five aspects of the Mother Tongue Method are applied equally well in a second language class.

Parent-Child Spanish

Many "Foreign Language in the Elementary School" or "Immersion School" programs can be adapted to include parents. For this article, the FLEX materials developed for the Milwaukee Public Schools under the direction of Anthony Gradisnik, Helena Anderson Curtin and Susan Buss have been selected. While they were not designed to be used by parents in the classroom, they are certainly adaptable. Materials by other authors will be used as well. It is not any particular curriculum that is advocated here but rather a methodology and an approach to teaching. In this case the language is Spanish.

In Class

Each class session might begin with an exercise from El libro de ejercicios de Gato Galano by Donald Charles. This activity is based on the Total Physical Response methodology of Asher. It involves children and parents in limbering-up, ice-breaking exercises based on listening and responding to commands--a good way to begin the day. These exercises can also be done at home.

The curriculum content is theme based. Many themes might be covered depending on the expected duration of the program. Some ideas include the following: Getting Dressed, Preparing for School, Meals, Chores and Responsibilities, Manners and Expressions of Courtesy, Family Fun and

Diversions, Personal Hygiene and Health, Warnings and Problems, Meeting Friends. The emphasis is on topics of mutual experience to parents and children, topics which can be learned in class but practiced at home, naturally. Each day this is introduced via conversations consisting of 3-5 lines of dialog between a parent and a child. Some models from the Milwaukee Public Schools materials follow. The theme of these dialogs is "Meals" ("Comidas").

English	Spanish
"Meals"	"Comidas"
1. DON'T FORGET THE NAPKINS!	1. NO TE OLVIDES DE LAS SERVILLETAS.
P: Did you set the table?	P: ¿Pusiste la mesa?
C: Yes. It's all done.	N: Sí. Ya la puse.
P: Oh, good! But, don't forget the napkins.	P: ¡Que bien! Pero no te olvides de las servilletas.
2. BUEN PROVECHO.	2. BUEN PROVECHO.
P: What do the Spanish say before they start to eat?	P: ¿Qué se dice en español antes de empezar a comer?
C: They say, "Buen provecho."	N: Se dice, "Buen provecho."
P: And what else do they say?	P: ¿Y qué más dicen?
C: Muchas gracias. Igualmente.	N: Gracias. Igualmente.
3. SUPPER IS READY. COME AND EAT.	3. LA CENA ESTA LISTA. VENGAN A COMER.
P: Supper is ready. Come and eat.	P: La cena está lista. Vengan a comer.
C: Good. I'm hungry.	N: ¡Qué bueno! Tengo hambre.
P: Enjoy your meal.	P: Buen provecho.
C: Thank you. The same to you.	N: Muchas gracias. Igualmente.
4. DO YOU WANT MILK OR LEMONADE?	4. ¿QUIERES LECHE O LIMONADA?
P: Do you want milk or lemonade?	P: ¿Quieres leche o limonada?
C: Milk, please.	N: Leche, por favor.
P: Very good. Milk is good for you.	P: Me alegro. La leche es buena para tí.

English	Spanish
"Meals"	"Comidas"
5. PLEASE PASS THE SALT.	5. POR FAVOR, PASA LA SAL.
P: Please pass the salt and pepper.	P: Por favor, pasa la sal y pimienta.
C: Here you are. And please pass the bread and butter.	N: Aquí están. Y, por favor, pasa el pan y la mantequilla.
P: Eat your vegetables.	P: Come tus vegetales.
C: But I don't like peas.	N: Pero no me gustan los chícharos.
6. SAY IT IN SPANISH, PLEASE!	6. DILO EN ESPANOL, POR FAVOR.
C: Mmmm! This tastes good.	N: Mmmm. This tastes good.
P: Say it in Spanish, please'	P: Dilo en español, por favor.
C: Mmmm! ¡Qué delicioso!	N: Mmmm. ¡Qué delicioso!

The teacher can select from existing materials or create her own. It is up to her to be creative in varying and expanding the scope of the conversations. Dialog #2, for example, could be expanded as follows:

Excuse Me	Con Permiso
P: What do the Spanish say when they must leave the table?	P: ¿Que se dice en espanol al salir de la mesa?
C: They say, "Excuse me."	C: Se dice, "Con permiso."
P: And what else do they say?	P: ¿Y que mas dicen?
C: "Of course. Go ahead."	C: "Claro. Pase usted."

This theme provides a good opportunity to introduce other foods as a vocabulary grouping, other familiar commands and other plural commands.

At Home

What happens in the classroom is basic to the language program. What happens at home is equally important. Parents are encouraged to follow the techniques recommended by Dr. Suzuki and to apply them to second language learning.

1. Listen

Each parent-child pair is provided a cassette tape of the material presented in class. At home they listen to songs and rhymes as well as

the dialogs. The listening phase is basic to a firm foundation in both the comprehension and production aspects of language aquisition and is grounded in Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis.

2. Apply Each Item to Daily Living Situations

The success of the program is tied to home practice in daily living interchanges between parent and child. Because each learned dialog is initiated by the parent, it is convenient to begin speaking Spanish when the parent sees the situation arise at home. Dinner table interactions lend themselves easily to the dialogs presented above.

3. Daily Practice and Repetition

Strictly in terms of hours, children are able to increase their practice time greatly when the home is an extension of the classroom. Within the theme of "meals," the parent is encouraged to label foods, napkins, etc., found in the kitchen to provide a visual reinforcement of the curriculum to complement the oral review on tape. Teaching younger siblings is another opportunity for repetition.

4. Slow but Thorough

Constant review is possible by replaying the taped material of previous lessons. Even listening by itself while one is occupied with another activity will help to drive home the sound system.

5. Everyday Parent and Teacher Attitudes

Both teacher and parent are encouraged to be creative in their teaching and to customize it to the individual parent-child pair. A parent will know what kinds of activities appeal to his/her child. The Milwaukee FLEX Spanish Supplement includes "Clown Cards," Spanish Songs, Fairy Tales, Drawings and Poems. It will be fun for the child to play the role of the parent sometimes. In short, a feeling of comaraderie can develop between parent and child through shared learning.

Summary

It is suggested in this article that children can learn a foreign language best if they begin at age 8-10. The world famous success of the Suzuki method of teaching children to play the violin provides evidence that the involvement of the parent in the lesson itself and in home practice enhances the child's level of achievement. Suzuki, himself, recommends that his methods be used in other fields. Teachers are encouraged to apply both the "Suzuki Triangle: Student, Parent, Teacher" and the five aspects of the "Mother Tongue Method" to the teaching of foreign language. Besides being pedagogically sound, this Parent-Child Language program results in increased support for foreign language programs and better school-community relations. There are both cognitive and affective benefits for the child, the parent, and the community.

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